Fatherhood, Unions Status and Men's Work Lives

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Abstract

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The proposed paper will focus on coordination across domains of life, specifically on the association of fatherhood and work in men's lives, with attention to how this association differs by men's union status. The first research aim is to update estimates of how three key events in men's pathway to adulthood, the transition to "first" job, the transition to marriage and the transition to biological fatherhood are sequenced during men's transition to adulthood. The second research aim of the proposed paper is to go beyond an examination of particular transitions and to provide a more detailed description of how men's work trajectories change when they make the transition to fatherhood and whether or not these changes vary by whether or not the man is married or in cohabiting union at the time of fatherhood.

Introduction

According to life course scholars, people take different pathways or trajectories within a given domain of life, such as work, over a substantial portion of their lives (Elder 1998). These pathways are made up of the timing (Neugarten and Datan 1973; Neugarten and Hagestad 1976; Neugarten, Moore and Lowe 1965) and sequencing (Elder 1975; Hogan 1978; Hogan 1980) of relevant transitions within the domain in question. For example, a person's work trajectory is made up of a series of transitions that may include events such as getting fired, receiving a promotion, or changing occupations.

Elder (1998, p. 956) points out that people are always involved in multiple pathways in different domains, a fact that requires people to coordinate across the different trajectories. This coordination occurs at the individual level in that decisions in different realms of life are often taken jointly. Linkages also occur at the social level (Hogan and Astone 1986). Social linkages can be organizational, such as when employers do or do not provide on-site childcare; institutional, such as when states provide unique job opportunities for mothers who receive public assistance, but not for the fathers of their children; or normative such as when there are culturally prescribed sequences of transitions such as the expectation that marriage precedes the transition to parenthood.

Traditionally, norms prescribed that men in the U.S. were to finish school, get a job, get married, and have children in that order, and men who deviated from this normative sequence had lower socioeconomic attainment that those who followed it (Hogan 1978; 1980). Many young men in the U.S., however, do not follow this

prescribed sequence. Looking at the High School Class of 1972, Rindfuss (Rindfuss 1991) classified only 28 percent of the cohort as following this sequence.

The proposed paper will focus on coordination across domains of life, specifically on the association of fatherhood and work in men's lives, with attention to how this association differs by men's union status. The first research aim of the proposed paper is to look at the sequencing (an important form of coordination) of three key events in men's pathway to adulthood, the transition to "first" job, the transition to marriage and the transition to biological fatherhood. We shall do this for a diverse group of men, including cohorts too young to have been included in Rindfuss' study. In this abstract we provide some preliminary results in pursuit of this aim.

The second research aim of the proposed paper is to go beyond an examination of particular transitions and to provide a more detailed description of how men's work trajectories change when they make the transition to fatherhood and whether or not these changes vary by whether or not the man is married or in cohabiting union at the time of fatherhood.

Background

There is abundant evidence that men's decisions about fatherhood are embedded in men's opportunities for paid work as well as their expectations, experiences and decisions about it. Income is positively associated with the payment of child support (Meyer and Bartfeld 1996) and other forms of father involvement (Landale and Oropesa 2001). Among married men, becoming a father is associated with both increased hours at work (Sanchez and Thomson 1997) and increased income (Nock

1998). Non-custodial parents report that their ability to spend time with their children and to provide them with non-monetary nurturance is greatly affected by their ability to provide for them financially. This is partly because custodial parents or guardians limit access to the children when money is not forthcoming (Pearson and Thoennes 1998). The relationship between fathering and work among non-custodial parents is not simply a consequence of custodial mothers' gatekeeping, however. Work affects men's psychological capacity for parenting. Edin and her colleagues for example (Edin, Lein and Nelson 2002), report that many poor men attribute positive changes in their work lives to increased motivation on becoming a father or at the birth of a particular child. Men also report deliberately staying away from their kids when they are not working steadily, because they feel that they should not have extensive contact with children they are not able to financially support

Research on men's work and fatherhood is somewhat fragmented. One set of research studies focus on non-custodial fathers who either have never been or who are no longer married to the mothers of their children. These studies often concern very specific questions about the effects of public policy on father involvement with children in this population (Argys and Peters 2001; Argys, Peters and Waldman 2001). Another set of studies focus on unmarried fathers, both custodial and non-custodial, such as those using the Fragile Families Study data (Carlson, McLanahan and England 2004). The reason for this focus is that random samples of the population under-represent unmarried fathers who do not live with their children, and those unmarried fathers who participate are known to underreport fertility that takes place outside marriage so a researcher cannot identify them as fathers (Rendall et al. 1999).

Yet another set of studies focus exclusively on married men who are custodial fathers of at least some of their children.. Nock (1998), for example, has examined how the transition to fatherhood (and the birth of higher order children) affects men's socioeconomic attainments, including hours worked, income and occupational status. Sanchez and Thomson (1997) examined gender differences in the effects of parenthood on labor force outcomes.

One underlying reason for this fragmentation (aside from the pursuit of highly specific research questions) is the idea that custodial fatherhood that occurs within marriage is fundamentally different from fatherhood that begins outside marriage or fatherhood that continues after marital disruption. This reflects a theoretical blurring of marriage and parenthood, particularly with respect to men. For recent cohorts, however, the tie between marriage and first birth has weakened considerably. The substantial rise in the non-marital birth ratio in the United States over the last 30 years is one of the most noted trends in family life (Ventura and Bachrach 2000). Even among those who become parents after marriage, however, the linkage has weakened, at least in terms of timing. Only about a third of first births occur in the first few years of marriage and more than a fifth occur after four years of marriage--a tripling since 1980 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997). With the exception of low parity, highly educated white women, the differences in fertility by marital status are surprisingly small (Rindfuss and Parnell 1989). In their national sample of non-marital births, the investigators from the Fragile Families study found that over four fifths of the babies' parents were romantically involved with each other and close to half were living together. Many of these parents--the majority among those cohabiting at the time of the

birth---were still romantically involved a year later (Carlson, McLanahan and England 2001).

The weakening association between marriage and parenthood does not mean that there are no systematic differences in how married and unmarried men take decisions about work and fatherhood. Rather, it suggests that general research on the role of fatherhood in men's life course should focus on all men, and test for differences in the associations of interest by union status, rather than making implicit assumptions about these differences by focusing on highly delimited populations of men or fathers.

Data and Methods

Data

We will draw on four nationally representative datasets for the proposed analyses all of which are or include samples of men at the ages when most make the transition to fatherhood. These datasets include: 1) the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (AddHealth); 2 the National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM); 3) the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 cohort (NLSY79); and 4) the National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6 (NSFG). The first three are longitudinal and collected data prospectively on men as they pass through the ages when the transition to fatherhood most commonly occurs. The fourth (NSFG) is a cross-sectional, surveillance survey, that includes retrospective information on men's lives.

Variables

FAMILY EVENTS Datasets we will use all include, at a minimum, men's fertility and union history. From these histories it is possible to identify the month and year when men first became biological fathers[1], the month and year when men first married, and men's union status at the time they first became biological fathers. Select datasets, provide more detailed information regarding transition timing making it possible to construct a complete, month by month union status history for each man.

THE TRANSITION TO "FIRST" JOB In his 1991 Presidential Address to the Population Association of America, Rindfuss chronicled the difficulties of measuring the multiple transitions that young adults make. One of the challenges of measuring these transitions is whether they can be classified as “crisp” or “blurred”—i.e., are we able to pinpoint a precise time when the transition occurs?

The transition into "first" employment is a “blurry” concept. In the preliminary results that accompany this abstract, where we are constrained to "act as if" this is a crisp transition, we propose to measure it as the entry into the first full-time job (i.e. 30 hours per week) that a young man held for at least six months. It is possible to construct a month and year for this event from all four datasets.

OTHER ASPECTS OF MEN'S WORK LIVES Following Nock (1998) we will consider different aspects of men's work lives in the analyses we will perform to fulfill the second aim of the research. The two aspects we shall begin with are: hours worked per week

[1] For the time being we plan to focus on the transition to first biological fatherhood. We will explore the possibility of including adoptive fatherhood as well for men that make the transition to adoptive fatherhood first. We will not include stepfatherhood or foster fatherhood in the proposed paper.

and income. It is possible we shall also include other aspects of attainment such as occupational prestige or sector of the economy. Full details on all aspects of work are available, week by week, from the NLSY79.

OTHER VARIABLES All the datasets contain information on the standard array of family background factors, such as ethnicity, nativity, and maternal education. In addition, all the datasets contain the dates or ages when important educational milestones, such as GED completion or college graduation.

Analytic Plan

In fulfillment of the first research aim, we have tabulated the distribution of men into the 16 possible sequences of first marriage, first fatherhood and "first" job (as defined above) for three of the datasets: AddHealth, NSFG and NSAM (see Table 1). We first divided the samples into men who completed none, one, two or three of these transitions. Then, we sub-divided these into the categories in Table 1.

In pursuit of the second research aim our analytic approach capitalizes on the fact that in the NLSY79 we have prospective data on young men's work trajectories. We shall use Hierarchical Linear Analysis, often referred to as HLM (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992; Burchinal, Bailey and Snyder 1994). Hierarchical linear analysis simultaneously estimates two equations, but it is clearer to think about the analysis as proceeding in two stages. In the first stage, an outcome (e.g. log earnings) at time “t” for a focal respondent “i”, is regressed on a vector of time varying covariates such as fatherhood status. That is, the outcome is regressed on the vector of covariates “i”

times, one regression for each of the individuals in the sample. The results of this first stage are sets of "i" coefficients (one set for the constant and one set for each element of the vector of time varying covariates). In the second stage these coefficients become the outcomes of interest. We can use HLM to examine whether or not the transition to fatherhood changes some aspect of the work trajectory, such as earnings. Consider a first stage model such as:

$$Y_{ti} = \beta_{0i} + \beta_{1i} X_{1ti} + \boldsymbol{\beta_{2i} X_{2ti}} + \beta_{3i} X_{3ti} + \boldsymbol{\beta_{4i} X_{4ti}} + \varepsilon_{ti} \qquad (1)$$

where Y_{ti} is log income (or hours worked) at time t for a man i , X_{1ti} is a dummy variable scored 1 if a man i was a father at time t, $\boldsymbol{X_{2ti}}$ is a vector of two dummy variables, the first of which is scored 1 if a man i was married at time t, and the second of which is a dummy variable scored 1 if a man i was cohabiting at time t, X_{3ti} is the age of a man i at time t, and $\boldsymbol{X_{4ti}}$ is vector of the interactions between fatherhood status and the vector of union status variables. Two second stage models may be written as:

$$\beta_{1i} = \gamma_{10} + \mu_{1i} \qquad (2)$$

$$\boldsymbol{\beta_{4i} = \gamma_{40} + \mu_{4i}} \qquad (3)$$

where γ_{10} is an estimate of whether or not the transition to fatherhood is significantly associated with a change in income and the vector $\boldsymbol{\gamma_{40}}$ is an estimate of whether or not the association between fatherhood and income varies by either marriage or cohabitation[2].

[2] Although we have not put forth hypotheses about how a man's individual characteristics (ethnicity or social class origins, for example) affect the association of fatherhood and work, HLM allows for these effects to have a random component (i.e. vary across individuals) and this is another advantage of the approach.

Preliminary Results

Table 1 contains the distribution of men into the 16 possible sequencing patterns of first marriage, first fatherhood and first job for AddHealth, NSAM and NSFG. The distributions vary markedly across the three datasets, largely because of the very different age ranges of men in the samples. The men from the AddHealth Survey were between18 and 28 at the time we assessed their sequencing; the men from NSAM were between 21 and 27 and the men from NSFG were between 15 and 44. The differences are most striking in the percentage of men who have not experienced any transition which in AddHealth and NSAM are larger due to the large percentage of young men in the samples.

In Table 1 we have printed in bold those sequences that traditionally were regarded as normative (or are consistent with a normative sequence in the case of men with fewer than 3 transitions). From Table 1 two things are clear. First, most men make the transitions in the traditional normative sequence: 61% in NSAM, 62% in AddHealth and 58% in NSFG. Second, of those who do not, the overwhelming majority fall in the group that makes the transition to work first, followed by parenthood. We indicate this in Table 1 with italics, and find that 10.2% in NSAM, 5.6% in AddHealth and 10.5% in NSFG men followed this pathway[3].

The results in this table are what one might expect given the weakening of the link between marriage and parenthood discussed above. They also suggest that, while the norm prescribing marriage before parenthood may be weakening (assuming that modal behavior is normative), the norm that men ought to be stably employed before

[3] Of course, some of those who have made only the transition to work might also eventually follow this pattern.

becoming fathers is still intact. This conforms to the evidence provided by the qualitative studies we discussed above.

In light of the findings from Table 1, we collapsed the male respondents to the NSFG into three categories: those who were neither fathers nor workers, those whose first transition was into full-time work (including those who were not yet fathers) and those whose first transition was to fatherhood (including those who have not yet made the transition to work). We chose to focus on the NSFG for the analysis reported in Table 2 because it has the largest age range (15-44) and therefore the largest number of men who have been exposed to the risk of fatherhood and jobs for a long time. In Table 2, we present the distribution of men into these three categories by a number of factors.

Table 2 shows that 19 percent of male respondents to the NSFG were neither fathers nor had ever held a full time job for six months or more. Eight percent made the transition to fatherhood before their first full time job that lasted at least 6 months, while 72 percent made the transition to fatherhood after this.

The third, fourth and fifth columns of Table 2 also show that men who made the transition to fatherhood first are systematically different from others with respect to a number of family background characteristics. Whereas only 5 percent of European Americans are in this category, the remaining three ethnic groups were characterized by at least two times the prevalence of “fatherhood first” status. The higher the level of education of the man's mother, the less likely it was that he became a father first. For example while 13 percent of men whose mothers had less than a high school diploma became fathers first, only 4 percent of men whose mothers were college graduates

becoming fathers first. Men who report that their parents were not married at the time of the focal man's birth are more likely to become fathers first. There are few differences by birth cohort.

Of particular interest to us was the finding that among those who became a father first, only 2 percent report that they have never worked for pay (not shown) compared to 5% over all (second column of Table 2). This finding raises three points. First, that the transition to work is blurry and it is likely that many of the men who become fathers before beginning a full-time job that lasted at least six months have had some involvement in the labor force. Second, many men who become fathers first work thereafter, perhaps in response to becoming a father. Third, it is possible that the ability to respond to fatherhood by increasing one's attachment to the labor force (by increasing hours, for example) may be associated with the trajectory of work before. The analyses we have planned toward fulfilling our second research aim will enable us to investigate these points in more detail.

Table 1. Sequencing of First Job, Marriage and Fatherhood Among Men in The National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM), the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (AddHealth), and the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG).

Sequencing of First job, Marriage, and Fatherhood	NSAM n=1290 Age Range 21 to 27 in 1995		AddHealth n=6759 Age Range 18 to 28 in 2000		NSFG n=4928 Age Range 15-44 in 2002	
		%	%	%	%	%
	100	100	100	100	100	100
No transition Yet	19.5		23.5		18.9	
One transition	45.6		59.1		24.9	
Job		**42.4**		**56.3**		**23.6**
Marriage		0.9		0.8		0.4
Parent		2.2		2.1		0.9
Two transitions	20.4		11.3		17.1	
Job ->Marriage		**10.5**		**3.5**		**9.2**
Job -> Parent		*6.2*		*3.2*		*4.5*
Marriage -> Job		1.3		1.6		1.2
Marriage -> Parent		0.9		0.4		0.6
Parent -> Job		1.0		2.4		1.4
Parent -> Marriage		0.6		0.2		0.2
Three Transitons	14.6		6.1		39.1	
Job -> Marriage -> Parent		**8.4**		**2.1**		**25.6**
Job -> Parent -> Marriage		*4.0*		*1.5*		*6.0*
Marriage -> Job -> Parent		*0.9*		*0.5*		*2.6*
Marriage -> Parent ->Job		0.5		1.0		2.0
Parent -> Job -> Marriage		0.6		0.4		1.5
Parent -> Marriage ->Job		0.2		0.7		1.4

2. Percent Distribution of Sequencing Patterns Among Men from the National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6 (2002) by Family Background and Ever W				
	Total	Neither Job Nor Father[1]	Job First[1]	Father First[1]
	Column Percentage	Row Percentage		
Total (n=4928)		19.4	72.7	8.0
Ethnicity (n=4928)				
European American	65.4	19.5	75.6	4.9
African American	11.9	21.8	64.8	13.4
Latino	16.7	15.5	71.2	13.3
Other Ethnicity	6.1	23.9	60.3	15.8
Mother's Education (n=4789)				
less than high school graduate	21.1	10.1	76.9	13.0
high school graduate	37.9	16.3	75.6	8.1
some college	20.1	25.4	69.4	5.2
college graduate or higher	20.1	29.5	67.0	3.5
Biological Parents Married at Birth (n=4890)				
yes	89.1	18.6	73.9	7.5
no	10.9	25.0	63.7	11.3
Birth Cohort (n=4928)				
1955-1959	7.6	1.4	88.3	10.4
1960-1964	17.8	0.5	86.6	12.9
1965-1969	16.9	1.3	88.8	9.9
1970-1974	16.7	1.6	88.9	9.5
1975-1979	14.8	10.4	81.7	7.9
1980-1984	17.3	50.8	46.8	2.4
1985-1989	8.8	95.1	4.6	0.3
Ever Worked for Pay				
yes	94.7	15.1	76.8	8.2
no	5.3	95.6	0.0	4.4

[1]These three columns contain row percentages

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